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SUCCESS STORY: MALAWI

Mothers Take Action Against HIV/AIDS

Frustrated with inaction, mothers spread awareness of HIV/AIDS



Photo: CRECCOM/Gemini Kamteme

Mothers determined to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS in Chambwe prepare to meet with schoolchildren to teach them about the epidemic.

“Many people around this school now appreciate the gravity of the AIDS pandemic, and time has come to stop playing games,” said D. Chakungwa, a facilitator of a group that is spreading awareness of HIV/AIDS.

The six teachers at Chambwe Primary School in central Malawi had long avoided discussing the danger and impact of HIV/AIDS on their students and community. The fact that they did not talk to students about the pandemic was not unusual. Nearby communities knew little about HIV/AIDS and were unaware of the grave impact of the increasing number of AIDS orphans.

Helping to bridge the gap, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through USAID is facilitating discussions about HIV/AIDS in communities throughout Malawi, including Chambwe. The program targets HIV/AIDS education to both students and their communities. After one community discussion, a group of women from Chambwe decided they could not wait for someone else to educate their children about the dangers of AIDS – they decided to do it themselves. The women began to counsel students on preventing HIV/AIDS infection. In addition, the group spoke to people in villages near the school. They visited homes of persons living with HIV/AIDS, providing moral support and financial assistance when possible. The mothers' group talks about HIV/AIDS at any gathering or place where people will listen – funerals, maize mills, markets, water wells, and churches.

Now students and communities are learning about HIV/AIDS and about caring for those affected by the disease. The group goes to Chambwe School twice a week to counsel and teach students about HIV/AIDS. “Many students at the school have really changed their attitudes and behaviors,” commented Mr. Chagwanjira, one of the teachers. Inspired by the mothers' group, students formed a drama troop that offers performances on issues related to HIV/AIDS at the school and in nearby villages. “Many people around the school now appreciate the gravity of the AIDS pandemic, and time has come to stop playing games,” said D. Chakungwa, the group's facilitator.

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